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ABSTRACT

Western Carolina University's task force on teaching effectiveness and the resulting faculty development program are described. Section 1 outlines the conditions from which the effort emerged, all supporting a climate in which mediocre teaching appeared to be the norm: changes in the student population, steadily increasing pressure on faculty for disciplinary specialization and publication, and lack of systematic preparation for college teaching. The effects of these conditions on faculty at the university before 1985 are described and task force activities from 1985-88 are reviewed briefly. The results of the activities include a reaffirmation of the centrality of teaching in the university's mission, increased respect among faculty for their colleagues, and increased collegiality, decreased criticism, and an increase in cross-disciplinary support teams. In addition, the institution has begun to gain a reputation for understanding and promoting teaching excellence. Finally, guidelines are offered for successfully adapting the program to other settings, including working from a base of scholarship, beginning with an interdisciplinary group of committed teachers, identifying special leadership skills, providing financial support and freedom from constraints, using strengths, sustaining faculty ownership, and modeling effective teaching in all sponsored activities. Contains two references. (Author/MSE)

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LIGHTING THE TORCH OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

Name of Program: Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

Lighting the Torch of Teaching Excellence

At Western Carolina University, a Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness has ignited the campus climate with enthusiasm for teaching excellence through a variety of revitalizing activities. The Task Force was active from 1985 until 1988, and then it was reorganized according to its own recommendations into a permanent unit called the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence. This report describes the evolution of the program, explains results achieved at Western Carolina University, and offers principles that can be applied on other campuses.

Section one points out background factors in higher education that gave rise to this effort. Over the past thirty years changes in the student population, a steadily increasing pressure on faculty for disciplinary specialization and publication, and the lack of systematic preparation for college teaching have produced a climate where mediocrity in teaching seems to be the accepted norm.

Next, the effects of these conditions on faculty at Western Carolina University prior to 1985 are described and Task Force activities from 1985 to 1988 are briefly reviewed. Results of these activities for WCU include a reaffirmation of the centrality of teaching in the University's mission, increased respect among faculty for their colleagues, and increased collegiality, decreased criticism, and an increase in cross-disciplinary support teams. In addition, Western has begun to gain a widespread reputation for understanding and promoting teaching excellence.

Finally, the following guidelines are offered for successfully adapting this program to other settings: work from a scholarship base, begin with an interdisciplinary group of committed teachers, identify special leadership skills, provide financial support and freedom from constraints, play to your strengths, sustain faculty ownership, and model effective teaching in all activities that are sponsored. These principles can help us meet the challenges that face higher education as we attempt to keep the flame of teaching excellence alive in the decade of the nineties.

Lighting the Torch of Teaching Excellence*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has been criticized in recent years for underemphasizing teaching. A recent report, "The Business of the Business," from the Higher Education Research Program urges colleges and universities "to acknowledge explicitly and forcefully that teaching and learning are their chief occupation" and to "support steps to improve instruction on their campuses" (Watkins, 1989, p.14). Conditions in higher education have not been conducive to such a recognition of teaching over the past three decades. Teaching has been increasingly devalued in relation to research, and disciplines have become more specialized and isolated. Five years before this report appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education, similar conditions prevailed at Western Carolina University.

In 1985, however, Chancellor Myron L. Coulter explicitly recognized that teaching is the central activity of this university and took action to stress that centrality. Since that time, the environment for teaching excellence on this campus has radically shifted through a variety of revitalizing activities. An organization has evolved to focus the institution's commitment to teaching excellence, and its principles of success are largely transferable to other college campuses. These principles can help us meet the challenges that face higher education as we attempt to keep the flame of teaching excellence alive in the decade of the nineties.

BACKGROUND FACTORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Many changes in higher education over the last thirty years have led to widespread devaluing of teaching. First, the student body has changed. In contrast with students of the sixties, who tended to be academically oriented and motivated to learn, today's college students come from far more diverse backgrounds, are often vocationally, rather than academically, oriented and are far more challenging to teach.

In addition, the press for disciplinary specialization was not as intense thirty years ago as it is today. Many professors now spend much time and energy staying abreast of the new knowledge in their fields, attending and contributing to discipline-based meetings, and serving their professional organizations. The expanding knowledge bases in each field has

*Additional information is available from Ben Ward, Director, Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC 28723.

necessitated that the primary loyalties of professors lie within their disciplines, rather than with their universities or their students.

Furthermore, even in traditional liberal arts colleges, the press to publish has increased over the past three decades. Indeed, a profile of the "complete" professor in the last decade of the twentieth century typically emphasizes productivity in research and publication along with competency in teaching and service. This triad of responsibilities is a challenge for even the most committed professionals. Frequently, faculty find they must shortchange at least one of these areas. Given the visibility involved in publications and in university service, the area which frequently becomes neglected is teaching.

Finally, most faculty are not prepared to teach. Many are unaware of the growing knowledge base on effective pedagogy at the postsecondary level, and others view it as the territory of professors of education. They simply reject the need for them to keep up with research on teaching as well as with research in their disciplines. Lately, however, increased attention has been paid to the preparation of graduate students for teaching. One accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, now requires that graduate teaching assistants "who have primary responsibility for teaching a course for credit must have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in their teaching field, be under the direct supervision of a faculty member experienced in the teaching field, receive regular in-service training, and be regularly evaluated" (Criteria for Accreditation, 1988, p. 29). Clearly, the intent is to expose prospective professors to effective teaching methods and to evaluate their performance in the classrooms. Unfortunately, professors already in the field have rarely had such an orientation, putting the burden on colleges and universities to develop quality programs emphasizing effective teaching.

Although many factors mitigate against an emphasis on teaching, two potent factors promote such an emphasis. First, the necessity of entering the classroom on a day to day basis and attempting to reach and teach students is the one common tie among professors across the country, regardless of discipline and regardless of personal agendas. No one wants to fail at it. Indeed, professors are used to success. They were successful as undergraduate and graduate students. In fact, they excelled or they would not have pursued graduate study.. They are used to excelling in academic settings and they want to continue their pattern of success as professors.

The second factor is the academics' love of learning. Professors are attracted to higher education because they love to learn and are good at it. They tend to have above-average

levels of curiosity and respond well to new information, especially when it is presented in an interesting manner and is relevant to their lives. The emerging data base about postsecondary teaching lends itself to interesting presentations and is eminently relevant to the everyday lives of professors. Given these two factors that promote interest in the topic of teaching effectiveness among faculty, the question becomes one of how best to marshall that native interest and desire to learn.

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Western Carolina University is a comprehensive regional university which has moved rapidly from a small teachers' college to a medium-size (6,200 students) university with a diverse array of undergraduate and graduate programs. Western is one of 16 institutions that make up the University of North Carolina system. We are enrollment driven. In 1985, when our emphasis on teaching began, the faculty at WCU was approximately 70 percent tenured and had an average of 17 years of service to the University. The average age of the faculty was approximately 51. Western is located in a rural region of the Appalachian mountains, which until recently made travel difficult and expensive for faculty.

As with many schools whose basic role and mission has changed across the last three decades, Western had a faculty who were caught in a paradigm shift with regard to their roles as teachers and researchers. Beginning around 1975, three years after becoming part of the University system, the University began to stress the full range of university faculty duties, including teaching, research, grant writing, and regional and professional service.

This paradigm shift in expectations for the faculty produced two different groups within the faculty. Those dedicated exclusively to teaching viewed with at least mild alarm the younger faculty who came with research skills and were prepared to divide their time between teaching and research. In turn, the newer, more research-oriented faculty sometimes developed a view of their senior colleagues that was less respectful than tradition dictated.

Added to this major philosophical difference, faculty also had high expectations for students. They believed that their undergraduate students should be like they were when they were freshmen, forgetting that they were not typical of the students in their freshman classes, and forgetting also that student achievement has changed across the last 20 years. Finally, faculty had unrealistic expectations about their teaching loads. Having observed their instructors at major doctorate-granting institutions, many expected to teach one or two

courses a term and were surprised to learn that the usual teaching load was four courses a term.

The push toward disciplinary specialization also was affecting faculty. As they became more and more immersed in their disciplines, faculty spent less time meeting with their colleagues across disciplines and became more isolated socially and psychologically within their departments.

As a result of these factors, in 1985 WCU had a faculty of approximately 330 people who were committed to their disciplines but did not coalesce as a collegial faculty committed to teaching. Those who were more oriented toward teaching were critical of "the researchers" and vice-versa. Some faculty were critical of the quality of students in their classes. Their attitude seemed to say, "If they would only bring us the right students, we would be excellent teachers." Few were familiar with the growing knowledge base concerning teaching in higher education.

At this point the Chancellor commissioned a Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness and gave it a three-part charge: to define teaching effectiveness, to find ways to support and reward teaching effectiveness, and to recommend ways of evaluating teaching effectiveness.

FIRST SPARKS

During the fall semester of 1985, ten faculty and two administrators came together and began a year-long study of the professional literature on effective college teaching. Task Force members attended selected conferences and reported to each other on what they were learning. During the year, eight members also participated as a team in a Revolving Institutional Exchange (RIE) program sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The RIE team was energized and inspired by interaction with similar teams at the University of North Florida and Georgia College. By the time teams came from those schools to Western in the fall of 1986, the Task Force had much to share.

Beginning in March 1986, an interactive newsletter with practical teaching tips was distributed regularly to all faculty and academic administrators. In May 1986, an intensive three-week seminar on teaching excellence introduced a dozen faculty to the knowledge base in college pedagogy. The goal of the seminar was to develop a cadre of faculty who could serve as resource persons in the ongoing effort to elevate the quality of teaching

across campus. Holding a reunion of that group at the beginning of the fall term provided an opportunity for participants to renew their commitment to teaching excellence, as well as for their department heads and deans to be informed about and become part of the new enthusiasm for teaching.

Early in the fall semester of 1986, the Task Force sponsored a week-long event featuring daily teaching tips luncheons, three panel presentations, and workshops led by Dr. Kenneth Eble, a distinguished visiting scholar from the University of Utah. Similar activities continued throughout the three years of the Task Force's existence, resulting in an ever-expanding cadre of faculty becoming involved in and excited by the activities focused on teaching. Table I presents a complete chronology of the activities of the Task Force during its three-year existence.

At the end of the three-year charge, the Task Force presented a 60-page report to the Chancellor synthesizing its study of professional literature on effective teaching and making recommendations for enhancing the quality of teaching at WCU. At that time, nearly two-thirds of Western's faculty had been involved in one or more of our teaching enrichment activities.

FANNING THE FLAMES

In 1988, the Task Force was reorganized, according to its own recommendations, into a permanent unit called the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence. The unit's mission is "to foster a campus-wide climate where teaching is highly valued and excellence in teaching is the norm." The Center has continued to foster and support the types of scholarship and activities that the Task Force pioneered. Whereas the Task Force began with 12 members, this year the Center has approximately 50 faculty working in a dozen teams on self-selected projects such as rewards for teaching, mentors for new faculty, student use of office hours, instructional use of computers and other media, writers' support, and other issues.

Outreach is another aspect of the Faculty Center's mission. In the summer of 1988, Western Carolina University hosted the Smoky Mountain Seminar on College Teaching and Learning, a national conference sponsored by the National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (NCRIPTAL). This conference met with such enthusiastic reception that it was expanded and repeated the following summer.

In addition, the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence hosted the Carolina Colloquy for College Teaching, a meeting for teams of three to five people from each of the sixteen

universities in The University of North Carolina system. This two-day meeting emphasized collaboration and interaction on identifying and reducing barriers to teaching excellence throughout the system. Each campus team framed an action plan for improving teaching on their respective campuses and expressed enthusiasm for a similar colloquy in 1990. Such a colloquy is now in the planning stages and, to keep the flames well lit during the year, newsletters will be distributed through a campus coordinator on each campus.

What began, then, as an initiative of a new chancellor, first caught the imagination of an interested, committed and energetic group of faculty who lit the torch for teaching excellence on one campus. Since that time, however, the light from that torch has spread to faculty on North Carolina's 16 university campuses and through the NCRIPTAL sponsored conferences to representatives from 36 states, creating a bonfire of energy and interest in developing excellence in teaching on college campuses.

RESULTS FOR WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Our experience with increasing the emphasis on teaching excellence at Western has changed the climate in several ways. First, the centrality of teaching has been reaffirmed by the administration and by two-thirds of the faculty. Second, faculty have learned new respect for their colleagues as they work together to share their newfound knowledge of the elements of teaching effectiveness as well as their experience in teaching. This respect has led to increased collegiality, decreased criticism, and an increase in cross-disciplinary support teams. Third, many faculty have discovered the knowledge base on teaching in higher education and some have even begun doing research on teaching within their disciplines. There is a growing awareness that being a professor requires not only knowledge of discipline but a vocation and ability to teach. Finally, Western has begun to move into a position of prominence in the state and region, attaining a reputation for understanding and promoting teaching excellence.

FUEL FOR YOUR FIRE

As the Task Force neared the end of its charge and the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence came into being, there was much reflection on the success of the Task Force activities. From this reflection came seven principles which Task Force members agreed were important elements in that success. These were incorporated into the design for our permanent center.

Work From a Scholarship Base

Faculty are faculty, at least in part, because they love to learn. Using this strength and the strengths that they already have in teaching by asking them to become both learners and teachers of the literature on pedagogy helps build a shared sense of the importance of teaching on campus as well as respect for interested colleagues.

Begin With an Interdisciplinary Group of Committed Teachers

The very diversity of our twelve member task force was energizing in the initial discussions of teaching. It was also important to invite participation from all faculty and to select the core group from among the strongest faculty who volunteered. This process ensured that those who agreed to form the core group were interested in pursuing the subject and that they had the respect of their colleagues, thus dispelling the myth that only weak teachers need to talk about teaching effectiveness.

Identify Special Leadership Skills

The third element of importance was the selection of a leader. Our Task Force was headed by a professor of counseling, skilled in group techniques, who helped the original core group to develop mutual respect, a sense of universality, positive regard for all members, and the ability to continue working together across the three year duration of the Task Force. The selection of a leader skilled in group techniques also assured that the healthy principles followed by the core group would provide the pattern for the operation of the permanent center.

Provide Financial Support and Freedom From Constraints

In this case, the Task Force was given a broad charge, modest resources as needs arose, and complete freedom in how to go about accomplishing their charge. As their vision grew, they continued to receive support.

Play to Your Strengths

From the very beginning, when the strongest faculty were invited to form the core Task Force group, the faculty and administrators involved believed that revitalization, not remediation, was our central goal. Therefore, the strongest faculty were invited to participate in seminars and, gradually, almost all faculty at Western involved themselves in one or more of the activities.

Sustain Faculty Ownership

Although faculty and administrators worked together, it was clear from the outset of this project that faculty owned it. Such broad-based ownership is absolutely essential to widespread faculty participation.

Model Effective Teaching

In every public presentation on campus and at national meetings, members of the ever-growing cadre of interested faculty took care to model effective teaching behaviors. They used media appropriately. They evidenced enthusiasm for their subject. They organized their presentations. They worked hard to communicate clearly. They began with a look ahead and ended with a summary. They evidenced a positive attitude toward themselves and the members of their audience.

TENDING THE FLAME

The logo of the Task Force on Teaching Effectiveness was a torch in which the letters T and L (standing for teaching and learning) were intertwined in the flame. This logo has been retained as the central symbol for the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence. The light from that torch has illuminated a central truth for our university: that teaching is the core of what we do and that nothing less than excellence in teaching is acceptable. The energy from that torch has been caught by the majority of our faculty on the campus, who now meet often to discuss the teaching literature, to contribute teaching tips, and to share insights and experience with each other. The heat from the torch has generated a climate of warm support and acceptance among many of our faculty, who now take pride in the quality of teaching at our University.

However, the flame needs constant tending if it is to remain a strong beacon for the faculty of this and other universities. As we enter an era of increased accountability to many constituencies, we must find ways to tend the flame of teaching excellence by describing the outcomes that we expect our teaching to produce and verifying that those outcomes exist. As the numbers of new faculty entering academe decline, we must find ways to keep our excellent teachers energized and committed to teaching so they will want to stay with us longer, and we must show as much conviction when we introduce new faculty to our institutional commitment to teaching excellence as when we discuss research requirements. Finally, in the approaching era of stable or reduced resources, we must find

ways to invest in faculty renewal in teaching, for without the light engendered by energetic faculty--committed to and informed about teaching excellence--in the decade of the nineties our campuses will be dark indeed.

REFERENCES

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1987, Criteria for Accreditation: Commission on Colleges, Atlanta, Georgia.

Watkins, Beverly T. "Colleges Urged to Avow that Teaching is Central to their Mission and to Take Steps to Upgrade It." Chronicle of Higher Education, 4/26/89, p. A13, A15.

TABLE 1

Chronology of Task Force Activities, 1985-1988

Three-year charge given to twelve-member Task Force by Chancellor Coulter:

1. Develop a working understanding of teaching effectiveness and its elements.
2. Find and implement ways of enhancing teaching effectiveness university-wide.
3. Identify the components and techniques of a good assessment program.

Initial bibliography presented to Task Force. Task Force begins reading. (November, 1985)

Task Force members attend selected conferences and report back to group. (November, 1985 - April, 1986)

Task Force meets every two weeks for two to three hours. Topics of discussion include:

1. WCU--Where we are, where we are going.
2. What are the elements of effective teaching at WCU?
3. Reports from members on books, articles, and meetings attended.

Task Force logo and T-shirts provides the group with a sense of identity and commitment.

First issue of Task Force Newsletter published and distributed to WCU faculty. (March 1986)

Three-week seminar for eleven hand-picked faculty members. (May 1986)
Goal: To develop a cadre of faculty to lead an on-going effort to elevate the quality of teaching across campus. Seminar participants, added to Task Force, increase faculty representation to 23.

Reunion dinner for seminar participants; Chancellor, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, academic deans, and participants' department heads are included. Participants discuss the seminar experience. After dinner, attendees break into groups by school to discuss ways to promote teaching effectiveness. (August 1986)

Task Force conducts "Excellence in University Teaching: A Week-Long Look." (September 1986)
Four Teaching Tips Luncheons: motivating students, lecturing, large classes, making a syllabus.
Three panel discussions : one with deans, one with faculty, one with students.
Presentation by Kenneth Eble, a visiting scholar , who also consults with the Task Force.

Original twelve-member committee is named the "Task Force Steering Committee" to oversee and coordinate the activities of all 23 members of the Task Force. (September 1986)

Task-oriented subcommittees are formed to work on specific projects regarding effective teaching.

Task Force Steering Committee begins writing position paper on the elements of effective teaching, compiling knowledge gained from books, articles, and meetings attended. (Fall 1986)

Task Force members visit Kennesaw College to consult on teaching effectiveness. (October 1986)

Task Force sponsors a one-day faculty symposium, "Scholarship: The Base," at WCU. (January 1987)

Four Task Force members make a presentation at the National Seminar on Successful College Teaching in Orlando, Florida. (March 1987)

A two-day workshop on effective teaching for first-, second-, and third-year tenure track faculty members is conducted during spring break. (March 1987)

Wilbert McKeachie, a visiting scholar, speaks to WCU faculty and has separate meetings with participants from the spring break workshop and with the Task Force. (March 1987)

Dr. Evelyn Hively of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities visits campus to consult with Task Force and makes a presentation for all faculty. (April 1987)

Task Force conducts two simultaneous three-week seminars on effective teaching, each for ten WCU faculty members. (May 1987).

Task Force members make presentation to chief academic officers of The American Association of State Colleges and Universities in Vail, Colorado. (July 1987)

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) publishes an article about the Task Force in the September 1987 Newsletter for academic vice presidents.

Dr. Carter Rowland, an AASCU representative, visits WCU to consult on the assessment of teaching effectiveness. (September 1987)

Task Force sponsors the first Teaching Tips Luncheon of the academic year. (September 1987)

Presentation for the North Carolina Association of Teacher Educators in Raleigh, N.C. (October 1987)

Presentation at Creative Management in Higher Education Conference in New Orleans. (November 1987)

Task Force hosts and consults with team from Appalachian State University. (December 1987)

Task Force meets with Chinese delegation from Guangdong Province. (February, 1988)

Presentation at National Seminar on Successful College Teaching in Orlando, Fla., "Promoting Teaching Effectiveness through Use of a 'Field Guide.' " (March 1988)

CELEBRATION OF TEACHING Events. (March 21-23, 1988)
Visiting scholar Joseph Lowman (UNC-CH) presentation, "Emulating the Expert Teacher."
Teaching Tips Luncheon I: "Curiosity and the College Student" led by Dr. Bruce Henderson (WCU).
Teaching Tips Luncheon II: "Who is Responsible for Learning in the Classroom?" (WCU students).

Presentation to Revolving Institutional Exchange teams, Milledgeville, Ga. (May 1988)

One-week intensive seminar for honors and regular faculty. (May 1988)

Presentation at the Smoky Mountain Seminar on College Teaching and Learning, hosted by WCU. (June 1988)

Final Task Force Report submitted to Chancellor Coulter. Report recommends a structure to incorporate teaching effectiveness activities permanently into the organization of the University. (June 1988)

Chancellor funds release time (1 FTE) for three "Faculty Fellows" to continue an emphasis on teaching effectiveness, as recommended in the Task Force report. (July 1988)

Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs appoints a new teaching effectiveness steering committee, including seven Task Force members, the Chair of the Faculty, and two other faculty. (August 1988)

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence opens in the library with the structure recommended by the Task Force , including a full-time director, three part-time faculty fellows, a secretary, and student assistants. (September 1988)